

Dementia is a disease of the brain



that can cause problems with memory, thinking, and actions. The disease worsens with time and is most common in older adults. Dementia can be categorized into three stages: mild, moderate, or severe. Treatment options depend on the stage of dementia and include managing both memory and behavioral disturbances.

Dementia is a nonreversible disease, but **certain drugs are used to slow its progression.** A VA physician may prescribe one of the following to help treat memory problems:

- Donepezil (Aricept®)
- Galantamine (Razadyne®)
- Rivastigmine (Exelon®)
- Memantine (Namenda®)

It is common for patients with dementia to also need treatment for depression, anxiety, aggression, or sleep problems.

REMEMBER...

None of these medications **cure** OR **stop the progression** of dementia, but they may slow the progression of disease and **allow the patient to be functional and independent** longer. (The benefits from these drugs may not always be noticed by the patient or their families.)

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ARMSTRONG COUNTY VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

Klingensmith Building
313 Ford Street, Suite 2B
Ford City, PA 16226
724.763.4090

CLARION COUNTY VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

AC Valley Medical Center
855 Route 58, Suite One
Parker, PA 16049
724.659.5601

CRANBERRY TOWNSHIP VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

Freedom Square
1183 Freedom Road, Suite A101
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
724.741.3131

LAWRENCE COUNTY VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

Ridgewood Professional Centre
1750 New Butler Road
New Castle, PA 16101
724.598.6080

MICHAEL A. MARZANO VA OUTPATIENT CLINIC

295 North Kerrwood Drive, Suite 110
Hermitage, PA 16148
724.346.1569



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Dementia



Medications for Memory Loss

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Alzheimer's Disease

Dementia occurs in various forms. The most common type is Alzheimer's dementia. In Alzheimer's dementia, healthy brain tissue worsens, causing a steady decrease in memory and mental abilities.

The early signs of Alzheimer's are usually **gradual and subtle**. They may include difficulty remembering recent events, trouble finding the right words, having trouble with complex tasks like paying bills or managing money, or getting disoriented or lost in familiar places.

In the mild-moderate stages of dementia, many patients remain functional and are able to live alone and care for themselves. However, they may require help with housekeeping, cooking, cleaning, paying bills, and transportation.



And it may take longer than usual to finish daily routine tasks, judgment may be poor, and patients may misplace items.

As the disease progresses and becomes more severe, dementia patients may forget the details of the past and names of family and friends. They may not be able to speak, walk, feed themselves, or use the bathroom.



When Should Treatments Stop?

Stopping dementia treatment is a difficult decision. Here are some general guidelines to help you:

- The disease is progressing and the patient is not getting better despite being treated
- The patient is reaching end of life or is in hospice care
- The patient is experiencing unwanted side effects
- The risks of treatment outweigh the potential benefits

It is often difficult to determine how effective the medications may be. Asking questions as part of a mental screening test can help determine their effectiveness.

Two Important Questions to Ask:

1. Are vital functions still maintained?
2. Are we prolonging the dementia or death?

The VA provider may prescribe a medication to help with dementia-related memory problems for a period of 2-3 months. If side effects are bothersome or symptoms do not improve during this trial, the medication may be discontinued.

Resources

Being diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or dementia can be overwhelming for both patients and their loved ones. The VA is **here to help** and there is **support available** in the community. Let us help you coordinate the care your loved one needs.

ElderCare

ec-online.net
800.677.1116

National Family Caregivers Association

thefamilycaregiver.org
800.896.3650

The Alzheimer's Association

alz.org
800.272.3900

AARP

aarp.org
888.OUR.AARP